



## Information about *Shigella* Infection

### Why Have You Been Given This Leaflet?

Your local council has a responsibility to investigate food poisoning and certain incidents of infectious disease. An officer from your local council's Environmental Health Department is contacting you to try and find out where your infection may have come from and to give advice on preventing further spread to others.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team has notified your local Environmental Health Department that you or one of your household is suffering from a *Shigella* infection. They are often the first to tell you what type of infection you have rather than your General Practitioner (GP).

The aim of this leaflet is to give you information and to answer some of the most frequently asked questions about *Shigella* infection. **Please take time to read this leaflet.**

### What is a *Shigella* infection?

*Shigella* is an infection of the bowel that can cause very severe diarrhoea. It is also known as bacillary dysentery. It is caused by highly contagious bacteria (germs) called *Shigella* of which there are four types.

- *Shigella sonnei* (this is the most common type seen in the UK)
- *Shigella flexnerii*
- *Shigella dysenteriae*
- *Shigella boydii*

### Where does it come from?

The bacteria can be found in the bowels of people and other animals that have or are recovering from the infection. This can lead to contamination of people, the environment, food and water.

### How can you get a *Shigella* infection?

The main way people are infected is from unwashed hands to mouth. Hands become contaminated especially after using the toilet. Germs can also survive on surfaces such as toilet seats, the flush handle, sink taps and door handles. Anyone who touches contaminated surfaces is at risk. The infection can spread easily among young children and within households.

You can become infected by

- Contact with other people who have the illness, through inadequate hand washing after using the toilet, and/or before food handling, particularly in households, nurseries and infant schools
- Eating contaminated cooked food or unwashed vegetables including salad
- Drinking or swimming in untreated water e.g. rivers, wells, springs or burns.

## **What are the usual symptoms?**

The main symptoms are

- Watery diarrhoea, sometimes containing blood, mucus or pus in severe cases
- Feeling sick and vomiting
- Abdominal pain
- Fever

## **When do these symptoms start?**

Symptoms usually begin within 1 to 3 days from swallowing the bacterial.

## **How long will the symptoms last?**

Symptoms can usually last from 3 to 7 days but can last for up to 2 weeks.

## **How do you treat a *Shigella* infection?**

Since most people with *Shigella* infection do not have symptoms for long, antibiotics are only needed if the symptoms do not clear up on their own.

It is important to drink fluids to replace the water lost through having diarrhoea and vomiting. This applies particularly for babies, children and the elderly.

If a young child has symptoms or if your symptoms continue or are particularly severe, consult your GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

## **Do I need to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities?**

**Yes**, it is important to stay at home until you have had no vomiting or diarrhoea for 2 days.

If you are an adult you should stay away from work and avoid visiting others. It is important that children stay away from school, nursery, playgroup or mother and toddler groups and avoid visiting others.

You should tell your employer you have *Shigella* infection if you work with vulnerable groups such as the elderly, the young, those in poor health or if you work as a food handler.

If any of your household are young children, work as a food handler, or provide care for or work with vulnerable groups they should stay off school or work until NHS Tayside Health Protection Team are sure they have not acquired the infection.

NHS Tayside Health Protection Team will contact and advise those who may be required to stay off nursery, school, work or other activities.

## **What should I do if I have symptoms again?**

If your symptoms return or become more severe (e.g. blood in diarrhoea) you should see a GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

## **What should I do if I know of others with similar symptoms?**

If a young child develops symptoms or if an adult has symptoms which are severe or last for more than 2 days they should consult their GP or seek medical advice from NHS 24.

They should, if possible, submit a stool sample via their GP.

You should tell the officer of the Environmental Health Department the details of the others you know to be ill. This information can help in identifying sources of infection.

## How can you avoid getting or passing to others a *Shigella* infection?

### Wash your hands thoroughly with soap and warm water

- Before preparing, handling or eating foods
- After handling raw food especially meat or poultry
- As soon as possible after working, feeding, grooming or playing with pets and other animals
- You should pay special attention to hygiene during farm visits, washing hands after any contact with animals, and eating only in designated areas
- After going to the toilet or changing a child's nappy
- By ensuring young children wash their hands.

### Handle food and drink safely

- Thoroughly cook meat and poultry so that they are cooked all the way through, and no blood runs from them
- Thaw frozen food properly before cooking
- Always reheat food thoroughly
- Do not use the same knives, chopping boards and equipment for preparing raw foods and cooked or ready to eat foods
- Thoroughly clean knives, chopping boards and equipment used for preparing raw foods with hot water and detergent after each use
- Never put cooked food back on an unwashed plate previously used for uncooked meat
- Do not wash raw poultry because this will splash germs around
- Store cooked or ready to eat food in the fridge separately from raw meats. Raw foods should not be stored above or beside cooked or ready to eat food.
- Store uncooked meat on the bottom of the fridge to avoid dripping raw meat juices onto other food
- Wash all fruit, salads and vegetables that are to be eaten raw
- Do not drink untreated water or unpasteurised milk
- Do not use ice or drinking water in countries where the water supply might be unsafe
- Do not buy ready to eat foods from shops where you believe food hygiene standards are poor. Report such places to your local Environmental Health Department
- **Do not** prepare food for others until your diarrhoea and vomiting symptoms have been stopped for 48 hours.

### Household Measures

Whilst you have symptoms you need to be scrupulously clean around your home.

- Make sure all members of your household wash their hands thoroughly with soap and hot water after going to the toilet and after handling soiled clothing or bedding
- Make sure that everyone has their own towel and that they do not use anybody else's
- Wash all soiled clothes, bedding and towels in the washing machine on the hottest cycle that the manufacturer would recommend
- Clean toilet seats, toilet bowls, flush handles, taps and wash hand basins after use with detergent and hot water, followed by a household disinfectant.

### Water Safety

- Do not use swimming pools (including hot tubs and paddling pools, etc.) if you have diarrhoea. You should wait until you have had no symptoms for 2 days
- Do not swim in water that may be contaminated
- Do not drink untreated water and avoid swallowing water when in lakes and swimming pools
- If your water supply is from a private water source please discuss this with the Environmental Health Department.

### Where can you get further advice?

If you would like any further advice about *Shigella* infection or food hygiene, please contact your local Environmental Health Department. The local offices are listed below

#### Angus Council

Economic Development and Environmental & Consumer  
Protection Department  
Dewar House  
12 Hill Terrace  
Arbroath  
DD11 1AH  
Website: [www.angus.gov.uk](http://www.angus.gov.uk)  
Email: [envhealth@angus.gov.uk](mailto:envhealth@angus.gov.uk)



Tele: 01241 435600

#### Dundee City Council

Environmental Health and Trading Standards Department  
1 Highland Chief Way  
Claverhouse West Industrial Park  
Dundee  
DD4 9UA  
Website: [www.dundee.gov.uk](http://www.dundee.gov.uk)  
Email: [food.safety@dundee.gov.uk](mailto:food.safety@dundee.gov.uk)



Tele: 01382 436260

#### Perth & Kinross Council

The Environment Service  
Pullar House  
35 Kinnoull Street  
Perth  
PH1 5GD  
Website: [www.pkc.gov.uk](http://www.pkc.gov.uk)  
Email: [es@pkc.gov.uk](mailto:es@pkc.gov.uk)



Tele: 01738 476476

#### Other useful sources of information

The National Hand Washing Campaign

[www.washyourhandsofthem.com](http://www.washyourhandsofthem.com)

The Food Standards Agency

[www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk)

Travel and Immunisation Advice

[www.fitfortravel.com](http://www.fitfortravel.com)

NHS 24

Tele: 08454 24 24 24 [www.nhs24.com](http://www.nhs24.com)

#### NHS Tayside

**Health Protection Team**  
Directorate of Public Health  
Kings Cross  
Cleington Road  
Dundee  
DD3 8EA  
Website: [www.taysidepublichealth.com](http://www.taysidepublichealth.com)



Tele: 01382 596976 or 596987

Further copies of this information are available or can be downloaded from the above NHS and local council. This information can be made available in Urdu, Chinese, Hindi, Arabic, large print, Braille or audio tape. Information in other languages and formats can be made available on request. Contact NHS Tayside Communications Department on 01382 424138.